



DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff **Scott Smith** Chief Deputy

Dive and Rescue in Dodge County

Recently there has been a great deal of attention to the water rescue capabilities of Dodge County following a request by the Beaver Dam Fire Department to bring their current equipment up to date. That equipment includes an updated boat and the replacement of a hovercraft that has reached end of life.

Beaver Dam has asked the townships which have contracted their services to assist in a portion of the costs for this equipment at about \$53,000 divided between the five townships over five years. In response to this the town of Beaver Dam wants the county to pay the township share of this equipment citing the duty of the sheriff. They went a step further asking that the county additionally fund a countywide dive team under the authority of the sheriff.

While a dive boat, a hovercraft and dive equipment for at least eight personnel would be great, it is also my responsibility to weigh the needs of our county to use tax dollars wisely. Information received from other sheriffs indicate new dive teams cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to equip and maintain. This is a serious cost to the county when it would do little more than create duplication of services already provided.

Wisconsin Statute 59.27(11) states the sheriff must "Conduct operations within the county.... for the rescue of human being and the recovery of human bodies". The key words are "Conduct operations". A dive team is not mandated by statutes.

Dodge County's operations begin with a patrol boat that is utilized for search and rescue, enforcement of recreational laws and other operations. It's deployable anytime there are open waters on our lakes. Our snowmobiles and ATVs are available to reach incidents when lakes are frozen over. We work with the Beaver Dam Fire Department for use of their boats and dive team. Several other fire departments, like the Hustisford Fire Department, have boats and ice rescue equipment for rescues in other lakes. In addition to these fire departments, the sheriff's office works with the Department of Natural Resources and US Fish and Wildlife gaining access to additional equipment and specialized watercrafts for rescues on our many marshes. As a result of these various resources, we far exceed the statutory requirement to conduct operations and we are in good hands when it comes to any of those teams throughout the county.

As it relates to recovery of human bodies, the sheriff's office is also prepared. Dodge County has six neighboring sheriffs who have all volunteered to assist under mutual aid and at no cost to Dodge County. They will bring their teams to Dodge County to conduct forensic dives in those unfortunate situations. They are highly trained at documenting evidence and have all indicated they could reach the Dodge County line in about an hour of our request.

The Green Lake County Sheriff tells me that he operates much as we do in Dodge County. He has a local fire department with a dive team and also relies on his neighboring sheriff's just as we do here. It is an arrangement that works well and other sheriffs in the state also use this method. It exceeds the statutory requirement and at the end of the day, provides for quickest response for our citizens. Of course, if the county board feels that current resources are not enough, I will do my best to provide enhanced services as requested.

I am proud of our emergency services as we work together to keep our lakes a safe place for recreation. It is just another reason that Dodge County is a great place to live, work and visit.

Dale J. Schmidt
Dodge County Sheriff